

By STEVE ISRAEL and NORMAN J. ORNSTEIN.

*Steve Israel is a Democratic representative from New York. Norman J. Ornstein, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is the co-founder of Why Tuesday?, a nonpartisan group seeking to increase voter participation.*

BY Nov. 4, more than \$5 billion will have been spent trying to persuade voters to cast their presidential and congressional ballots one way or another. Despite all the money and the news media hysteria, and even with record numbers of Americans heading to the polls, the United States won't even come close to the top nations in the world for voter turnout. We will be well behind -- to name just a few -- Iceland, Sweden and New Zealand.

What do those countries, among many others, have in common? Their citizens all vote on a weekend day. But in the United States, for more than 150 years, we've voted on Tuesday. Why? It's not in the Constitution. It isn't to avoid holidays. And it's not because people hate Mondays.

The reason we vote on Tuesday makes perfect sense -- at least it did in 1845.

To understand the decision Congress made that year, let's imagine ourselves as members of early agrarian American society. Saturday was for farming, Sunday was the Lord's day, Monday was required for travel to the county seat where the polling places were, Tuesday you voted, Wednesday you returned home, and Thursday it was back to work.

It's a safe bet that today most Americans don't follow the same schedule as our farming forefathers. In fact, for many, Tuesday is one of the most inconvenient days to hold an election. One in four people who didn't vote in 2006 said that they were "too busy" or had "conflicting work or school schedules."

Legislation now before Congress would finally tailor our voting system to modern American life by establishing weekend voting for national elections. (Mr. Israel is sponsoring the bill in the House.) Here's how it would work: The presidential election would be held on the Saturday and Sunday after the first Friday in November, while for those who aren't often home on the weekends, there would be a few days of early voting.

Our current system penalizes single parents, people working two jobs, and those who have to choose between getting a paycheck and casting a ballot. Two weekend days of voting means those working families would have a greater chance of making it to the polls. It means easing the long lines during rush hour at the polling sites. It means more locations, more poll workers and more voters.

Some have suggested making Election Day a holiday, but that would involve a serious cost to the economy. Moving Election Day to the weekend means more convenience and less expense.

Making a change like this won't be easy, but it's not unprecedented. In 1968, Congress passed the Monday Holiday law, which moved Memorial Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day and Washington's Birthday from their original dates to Mondays. If we can alter our federal holidays to benefit shoppers and travelers, surely we can change Election Day for the benefit of our voters.

Let's take a cue from the Congress of 1845 and ensure that voting is available to as many working Americans as possible -- not just those who can make it to the polls on a Tuesday.